

*Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost*

October 2, 2011

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Galatians 2:11-16

*When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?" "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (NIV)*

There is a French folk tale about a small village which had just received word of a new king. The village decided to honor this king by having each person bring some wine to be put into a large barrel which would then be presented as a gift to the king. The village blacksmith decided that since the rest were bringing wine, he would bring water. No one would notice the difference anyway. So when it came his turn to put the contents of his jug into the barrel, he poured in the water. The time came for the big presentation, and when they turned the spigot on the barrel, out came pure water. All the villagers did the same as the blacksmith. Each depended on the others to do the job. Not a single person in the village carried out their responsibility and the king ended up being shown very little honor indeed.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, today the Lord speaks to us about an important responsibility He has given us. It is a job that in all truth we have to confess we too often leave for someone else to do. Many times we evade this responsibility that the Lord has given to His Church and depend on others to do it. We end up showing our Savior and King very little honor. As we repent of such sin this morning I pray our Savior's forgiveness comforts our hearts and takes away our guilt for all the times we have failed our brothers and sisters. I pray our Savior's love fills us with a renewed eagerness to do our jobs and carry out in love our responsibilities to and for one another. As we witness Paul's example, the Lord wants us to also see: **We are our brothers keepers!**

We observe this truth in all three of our lessons this morning. We are to reach out to our brothers and sisters who fall and stumble in their faith. Each one of us is to call the sinner back to repentance. God has given to His Church the very keys of heaven that if we forgive anyone their sins they are forgiven but if we do not forgive them they are not forgiven. We are to be a watchman who sounds the warning when people's souls are in danger. If we have become aware of someone caught in a sin we are to start by going to that person and show that person his or her sin, keeping it for the time just between the

two of us. We are to encourage each other and watch out for anything or anyone that might damage a person's faith.

This is exactly what the apostle Paul did in Antioch. Antioch was the site of the first congregation known for its Gentile members. This congregation sent out Paul and Barnabas and was the launching pad for further mission work. It was here that we read: ***“when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.”*** Talk about a difficult thing to do. It is tough enough to confront any sinner. It is intimidating to tell anyone when they are in error of God's Word. But to tell Peter, the great apostle and a pillar of the early church, the brash and bold leader and close disciple of Jesus, can you imagine! Yet, Paul did not ignore the problem. Paul did not talk behind Peter's back with a bunch of his pastor buddies saying: *“Hey, guys. Guess what Peter is up to...can you even believe that guy...what a hypocrite!”* No, Paul went straight to his brother in the faith, to Peter, and told Peter the truth. He was in the wrong.

What was the issue here and where did Peter go wrong? ***“Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.”*** The Lord had made it very clear to Peter that the Old Testament Mosaic laws about what foods were clean and unclean no longer are necessary. All those ceremonies pointed to Christ who had come. So Peter was free to eat non kosher meals with the Gentiles and he did. But there were still some Jews who said those laws must be kept. They even said they must be kept in order to be saved. When these men came around Peter stopped eating with the Gentiles. Because Peter did so he was influencing others, including Paul's faithful companion Barnabas, to do the same.

So Paul writes: ***“When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, ‘You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? ‘We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.’”*** Do you see why Paul was so concerned? Do you see why Paul had to confront his brother? Do you see why this rebuke was necessary? Paul wasn't anti Jewish or against their customs - Paul himself was a Jew. Neither was Paul showing some cultural bias. What was at stake here was a teaching that endangered people's salvation! A soul destroying error was rearing its ugly head. They were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel. So Paul addresses Peter in front of them all. You might ask why not pull Peter aside and talk to him privately as Jesus says to do in Matthew. Because Matthew is writing about a sin against you, a sin that only you know about. This sin was public. Peter was doing this publicly and needed to be rebuked publicly so others would take warning.

In effect, what Paul says to his brother Peter so all can hear is: ***“Come on Peter! Even we Jews don't trust in our keeping of Moses' ordinances and ceremonies, because we know that our salvation rests solely on the work of Jesus Christ. And if even we to whom the law was given don't rely on it for salvation, why should we pressure Gentiles***

*to keep it?* This is folly. The real danger in urging people to keep the Mosaic Law is that some were being led to put their trust and confidence in their obedience and good works. Then they are trusting something that can't save them "***because by observing the law no one will be justified.***" This is why Paul confronts Peter. He was his brother's keeper. He was concerned for Peter and all the other brothers and sisters in faith around him. And Paul won his brother over. From Acts and other letter Peter realized his sin, and that he had once again given into fear, and that he was clearly in the wrong. Peter repented.

For the very same reasons we are called to be our brothers keepers. I understand this is not always an easy thing to do. It is much easier to run and tell pastor about an issue. It makes it even easier to just ignore the problem. Our sinful natures would much rather just talk about other people and their sins, to gossip behind their backs. Again may we fall to our knees in repentance for such sins. As we do Jesus once again picks us up and directs our eyes to His cross. There Jesus paid the price for all the times we have shrunk away from our God given responsibilities. There Jesus was punished for our sins. Jesus, who always spoke the truth in love to sinners, laid down His perfect life to save ours. His empty grave is our certain proof that we are saved and all our sins are forgiven. In Christ our sin and guilt has been taken away forever!

We understand, like Paul, that this is the only way anyone is saved - through faith in Christ Jesus. Because we know this don't we want to do the same as Paul anytime someone is not acting in line with the truth of the gospel? We don't want others to go to hell. So when someone is on the path to hell we want to speak up. God has again given us the very keys to heaven - to tell the unrepentant sinner that right now heaven is closed to them - to tell the sinner that repents that heaven is once again their free gift in Christ. Our goal is always to win the sinner over. That my friends is what it is to have a Christ-like heart. When it comes to our brothers and sisters in faith may we never have the attitude that it is none of our business. May we never say let someone else do. God has given all of us this great privilege and responsibility to speak His saving truth and to speak it in love. When we, all of us, faithfully recognize yes I am my brother's keeper, souls will benefit and our King will be honored indeed! Amen.